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ABSTRACT

Investigated with 280 special education teachers attending graduate summer classes was the effect of students' race and sex as it related to placement practices. Ss were assigned to one of four groups; group 1 received a case study depicting a White male; group 2 received a case study depicting a White female; group 3 received a case study depicting a Mexican-American male; group 4 received a case study depicting a Mexican-American female. In summary, regardless of the sex of the child, teachers scored special class placement more appropriate for Mexican-American than they did for White children. (SBH)

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Teacher Bias in Special Class Placement

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Previous research has indicated that certain child characteristics affect teacher expectation and behavior. These characteristics include sex, physical attractiveness, handicaps, and race.

Special educators have continually noted that boys seem to fail in school at a much higher rate than girls. This isn't surprising since sex seems to be an important factor in the formation of teacher expectancy.

Palardy (1969) investigated teachers' beliefs in sex differences in first-grade reading. He asked a number of teachers whether or not they believed that boys would be as successful in learning to read as girls. He divided the teachers into two groups: A) those that said both sexes would be equally successful and B) those that said girls would do better. It was found that the boys being instructed by Group A did, in fact, achieve as well as the girls. Conversely, in Group B the girls scored significantly higher than the boys. The author interpreted these findings as the result of teacher expectations.

Sex of the student has also been found to influence teacher perceptions relative to intelligence of their students. Teachers tended to overrate the IQ's of girls and underrate the IQ's of boys. Another frequent finding is that boys are subjected to much more teacher disapproval and criticism than girls.

Our culture has long held the belief that physical attractiveness represents only a superficial or minimum influence on the lasting impressions we form of others. Research, however, has shown that attractiveness has more than a minimal influence. An article in Psychology Today in 1972 called

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"Beauty and the Beast" by Berschied and Walster reported a number of studies dealing with normal children. They reported findings that indicated:

1. That attractive children were more popular with their peers than unattractive children.
2. That adults' perceptions of the behavior of children was biased by the level of attractiveness.
3. That attractiveness influenced teachers' judgments of intellectual potential.

In regard to handicapped children there was a study reported in 1975 by Ross and Salvia. This study investigated what effects attractiveness would have on teachers' willingness to recommend special class placement and on teachers' judgments of future school-related behavior.

The investigators prepared a fictitious psychological report for an 8 year old child in case study format. Evidence was presented of below average academic functioning, low IQ (78), some evidence of immaturity, and no significant behavior problems. Photographs of either an attractive or unattractive child were attached to the case studies. Seventy-six second, third and fourth grade teachers were asked to read the case study and answer four questions. Half of the teachers received a case study with the attractive picture attached while the other half had the unattractive picture attached.

A comparison of the teacher ratings indicated a significant effect for attractiveness. According to the teachers' ratings, placement in a special class was deemed more appropriate for unattractive children, further psychological evaluation would reveal lower functioning by unattractive children, unattractive children would experience more difficulties in peer relationships

and in academic work. The authors concluded that "there is a great deal of subjective judgment in educational decisions, and unattractive children seem to be at a distinct disadvantage simply because they are unattractive."

The fact that some youngsters are labeled handicapped has been shown to be a significant factor in the way in which these children interact with either regular or special class teachers. Not only does the label affect teacher perceptions and expectations, but it also has been demonstrated to create stereotypes which can be detrimental to the academic and/or social development of children. Stereotyping has been found to exist even with teachers who have been trained in special education.

A study by Salvia, Clark and Ysseldyke (1973) attempted to determine if stereotypes of exceptionality are maintained in the face of normal behavior. In other words, when a teacher encounters intellectually normal children who are improperly labeled will they rate the children according to their behavior or according to the label?

In this experiment undergraduate students in special and general education were randomly assigned to three experimental groups. The subjects were shown video tapes of a child performing a task. One group was told the child was mentally retarded, one group was told he was gifted, and the third group was told he was normal. After viewing the child the subjects were asked to rate him on his performance. (The child was normal.)

The results indicated that the child who was labeled gifted was rated better than the normal child. They concluded that even teacher trainees who have been trained to react mainly to observed behavior still have a tendency to retain stereotypes of handicapping conditions that are not present.

In another study dealing with teacher trainees, Foster, Ysseldyke and Reese (1975) used 38 students enrolled in an introductory class in the education of the emotionally disturbed. The study really had two parts. First, they wanted to see if these teacher trainees would rate a hypothetical emotionally disturbed child more negatively than a hypothetical normal child. Secondly, when presented a videotape of a normal child would they rate him more negatively when they are told he is emotionally disturbed than when they are told he is normal.

They conclude, "This research suggests that these normal behaviors can be misinterpreted as typical of negatively categorized children. Logic dictates that an experimenter bias effect may then come into play, with the teacher behaving toward the child in ways consistent with the bias. If the child responds to the bias, he may in turn reinforce the teacher's expectancies. A series of positive feedback loops is established and an iatrogenic disease is in the making."

Jackson and Cosca (1974) surveyed 494 classrooms in the southwestern U.S. The study was designed to measure whether the ethnicity of the student influenced the quantity or the quality of teacher verbal interactions. In particular, they were looking for any disparity between Chicano and white children. The results indicated that:

1. Teachers praised or encouraged whites 35% more than they did the Chicano children.
2. They accepted or used the ideas of whites 40% more than they did the ideas of Chicanos.
3. They directed 21% more questions to whites than to Chicanos.

It was concluded that the Chicano child received substantially less of those teacher behaviors presently known to be most strongly related to

gains in student achievement.

A study by Hawkes and Furst (1973) investigated whether or not white teachers were generally accurate in their perceptions of the feelings of their black children. They had 704 black children complete a questionnaire designed to measure general anxiety and asked the teachers to predict how the child would answer. This anxiety scale consisted of 16 items. The teachers' predictions averaged out to 6 correct predictions per child.

Leacock (1969) explored how teachers explained the same student behaviors in lower class black schools and in middle class white schools. The behavior cited was student inattention. In the lower class school this was viewed as being due to the "limited attention span of blacks." In the middle class school it was perceived as the fault of the teacher in not maintaining student interest.

Finally, it is apparent that the concept underlying this previous research is that of teacher expectancy. Teacher expectations are inferences or predictions that teachers make about the present and future academic achievements and general classroom behavior of their students. Taken by themselves, expectations are neither good nor bad and are virtually impossible to avoid. Everyone forms perceptions and expectations of people with whom they interact. The ultimate effect of these perceptions depends upon their accuracy, flexibility and the manner in which they are communicated.

Again, given the fact that teacher expectations are both normal and ubiquitous, their potential for adversely affecting student achievement and behavior is determined, not by their presence or absence, but instead by their degree of accuracy, flexibility, and potential for adjustment in response to change in the student.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher bias in special class placement. Specifically, to investigate the effect of students race and sex as it related to placement practices.

Method

Subjects

Two hundred eighty subjects were randomly selected from a pool of 361 special education teachers attending graduate summer classes at a large state supported university. Approximately 50% of the subjects were working toward graduate degrees and approximately 80% held teaching certificates in special education.

Materials

A fictitious case study similar to that used by Ross and Salvia (1975) was employed. The eight year old child in this case study was depicted as functioning approximately one year below grade level academically. The historical data provided in the fictitious report was meant to create an equivocal case. That is, there was no hard evidence to provide justification for special class placement.

Attached to the case study was a response sheet containing the following statement: "Placement in a special class for educable mentally retarded students would be appropriate for this child." This statement was followed by a 7-point Likert scale ranging from disagree very strongly (scored as 7) to agree very strongly (score as 1).

Procedures

The subjects were randomly assigned to one of four groups. Group 1 received a case study depicting a white male; group 2 received a case study depicting a white female; group 3 received a case study depicting a Mexican-American male; group 4 received a case study depicting a Mexican-American

female. All case studies were identical except for race and sex of the child.

The directions given to the teachers were as follows: "The purpose of the following activity is to gather information regarding teacher judgments about student performance based on case study information." In addition, the following statement preceded the response sheet: "Based on the information in the case study you have just read, please respond to the following statement."

Results

The data consisted of the subjects' scored responses to the statement following a case study. A 2X2 (Race X Sex) analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure was performed on the response data. Results of the ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for race ($F = 12.99$, $1/276$ df, $p < .001$). The teachers' mean response for the white children was 5.97 ($SD = .78$) while the mean response for the Mexican-American children was 5.53 ($SD = 1.21$). Thus, teachers scored special class placement more appropriate for Mexican-American children than they did for white children.

Neither the main effect for sex nor the race x sex interaction were significant. ($p > .05$). Thus, teachers scored males and females equally on this dimension. In summary, regardless of sex of the child, teachers scored special class placement more appropriate for Mexican-American children than they did for white children.

Discussion

Evidently, the expectations that the teachers held were so strong they pervaded the identical information contained in the case studies leading to differential treatment of the students. The implication to be gleaned from this is quite clear. Decisions involving educational placement of minority group students must be reviewed in a due process fashion, giving particular attention to the available evidence relating to teacher bias in

educational decisions.

Further research in this area should be undertaken to investigate the parameters of these results. For example, investigations dealing with the characteristics of teachers who exhibit bias as opposed to those who do not.

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